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ABSTRACT

This report intends to describe a program designed to enhance reading comprehension. Reading comprehension relies on skills that enable students to remember facts, draw out main ideas, make inferences, and relate reading to personal experiences. The focus group consisted of middle and high school students in a metropolitan area in northern Illinois. Analysis of probable cause data indicated that students had a lack of motivation, fluency in reading, limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, and a minimal interest in material being read. The literature has indicated that intrinsic motivation for literacy declines in middle school. For students to be part of today's ever-changing society and workforce, reading comprehension is an essential skill. A review of solution strategies suggested by researchers has resulted in possible solutions through interventions. The various instructional methods to be used will include thinking skill instruction, cooperative groups, multiple intelligence strategies, and metacognition skills. Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' reading comprehension skills. Appendixes contain: a sample of Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment; a sample of Reading Interest Inventory; and a Sample of Gates-MacGinite Reading Tests. (Contains 23 references, 16 figures, and 2 tables.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING STUDENT COMPREHENSION SKILLS THROUGH INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report intends to describe a program designed to enhance reading comprehension. Reading comprehension relies on skills that enable students to remember facts, draw out main ideas, make inferences, and relate reading to personal experiences. The focus group consisted of middle and high school students in a metropolitan area in northern Illinois.

Analysis of probable cause data indicated that students had a lack of motivation, fluency in reading, limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, and a minimal interest in material being read. The literature has indicated that intrinsic motivation for literacy declines in middle school. For students to be part of today's ever-changing society and workforce, reading comprehension is an essential skill.

A review of solution strategies suggested by researchers has resulted in possible solutions through interventions. The various instructional methods to be used will include thinking skill instruction, cooperative groups, multiple intelligence strategies, and metacognition skills.

Our expectations are that post intervention data will indicate an increase in students' reading comprehension skills.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The special education students in two classrooms within a middle school and a high school in the same district had difficulty moving beyond decoding words to a better understanding of the meaning of those words. Evidence for the existence of the problem included documented teacher's observations, quarterly assessments that measured reading comprehension skills, and written assignments that assessed vocabulary skills.

IMMEDIATE PROBLEM CONTEXT

Building One:

Building One was a middle school which consisted of 867 students ranging from 6th through 8th grade and had been recognized as a "Lead Middle School". A total of 214 students received Special Education services within learning disabled, behavior disordered, and mentally impaired self-contained and learning disabled and behavior disordered resource classrooms. The attendance rate was 86.9%. The chronic truancy rate was 23.4% with a number of 249 chronic truants. The ethnic background of students attending Building One consisted of 57% Caucasians, 27.3 % African Americans, 12.5%

Hispanics, and 2.6% Asians. Forty six point two percent of students were from low-income families.

Building One consisted of one principal, two assistance principals, and three counselors. There were a total of 58 teachers. Course studies provided included English, math, social studies, foreign languages, computer technology, visual arts, music, health education, physical education, home arts, career/seminar. Special education services consisted of eight LD/BD/MI self-contained teachers and five LD/BD resource teachers. The average years of teaching experience was 14.9%. An average of 24.6% teachers had a Bachelor's Degree. An average of 75.4% of teachers had a Master's Degree.

Building Two:

Building Two was a high school which consisted of 1,495 students ranging from 9th through 12th grade. It housed the school district's high school Academic Gifted and Creative and Performing Arts Programs. Building two had about 230 special education students receiving services in LD/BD/MI self-contained and resource classrooms. The ethnic background of students was as follows: 56.7% Caucasians, 32.8% African Americans, 6.4% Hispanics, 4.1% Asians and Islanders. Thirty four point nine percent of students were from low-income families and received free or reduced lunch. The attendance rate of Building Two was 87.3% with a chronic truancy rate of 27.3%.

Building Two consisted of one principal, one associate principal, two assistant principals, and five counselors. The staff consisted of 114 teachers who provided course instructions in English, math, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, music/art, dance, vocational education, drivers education, ROTC, health, and special education. The Special Education Department consisted of 14 instructors.

Building Two had a new science and technology wing that offered an improved learning environment with expanded areas of study. Some other unique programs were: Peer Mediation, Peer Mentoring, Natural Helpers, Discover Program, Upward Bound, Advance Placement Classes, and a Principal Scholars Program. Some unique student-centered clubs included: African American Club, Amnesty International, National Honor Society, School Newspaper, Theatre Club, Visual Arts Club, Math Club, and an award-winning JROTC program.

District

The school district covered 170 square miles. The district consisted of about 4,000 employees. Total student enrollment grades K-12 was 27,605. The District consisted of 40 elementary schools, six middle schools, and four high schools. A student assignment program known as Controlled Choice offered students entering kindergarten, sixth, and ninth grades numerous school choices. The ethnic background of all students in the district was as follows: 53% Caucasian, 30.5% African American, 13.1% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. The District's attendance rate was 91.4%, with a chronic truancy rate of 11.9%. High school graduation rate was 75.6%. High school drop-out rate was 8.9%. The average ACT Score for the students in the district was 22.2.

The total number of classroom teachers in the District was 1,691. There was a pupil-teacher ratio of 19:1. There was a pupil-administrator ratio of 276.5 :1. The ethnic background and gender of teachers in the District was as follows: 88.9% Caucasian, 5.9% African American, 3.9% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American; 26.4% male, and 73.6% female.

THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

The school district was located in a large metropolitan city. The population of the community was 143, 763. The population consisted of 90.7% Caucasians, 7.7% African Americans, 4.7% Hispanics, 1.3% Asians and Pacific Islanders, and 0.3% Native Americans.

The educational background of the people in the community was as follows: 8.3% of the people had less than a 9th grade education; 15.3% had 9th to 12th grade education with no diploma; 36.1% of the community were high school graduates; 18.7% college had taken courses with no degree; 6.0% had an Associate degree; 10.7% held a Bachelor's degree; 4.9% held a Graduate/Professional degree. The higher learning institutions near the community consisted of three community colleges, three four-year colleges, a business college, and a college of medicine.

The major private employers included many industries such as car manufacturing, aerospace, health systems, screw products, and fasteners. Most of the community's working population were employed in manufacturing, services, or retail. The average per capita income was $25,938. The median household income was $38,197.

Community support for the local schools consisted of sixteen local companies supporting education through what was known as "Business/Education Partners", YMCA, local park district, outreach programs, community training for students with disabilities, Community Career Awareness Task Force, communities centers, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs.

The National Context of the Problem

Difficulty with reading comprehension among older students is a pervasive problem. It was shown in a survey conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress that only 40% of all adolescents could read well enough to comfortably manage standard secondary school texts (Kurek, 2000). Secondary students must read to learn and not read to just decode written words for accuracy and speed.

The 1998 Nation's Report Card on Reading, issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, showed that 26% of United States eighth graders and 23% of twelfth graders were reading below the basic level (Ogle, 2000). This means that students do not necessarily demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of a text by drawing out its main idea. In 1999, the International Reading Association's commission on Adolescent Literary urged schools to provide students the needed training in reading skills (Allington, Roller 2000).

The author John Holloway (1999) cited several sources that commented on students' low level of reading skills. Some of the sources included, The National Center for Education Statistics, a study conducted at San Diego Morse High School by Joyce, Showers, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt (1998), and a study conducted by researcher Nancy Collins. In the study conducted by Nancy Collins, it was noted that there were major reasons why students lacked the skills needed to understand/comprehend what was read.

Guthrie, Alao, and Rinehart (1997) noted that intrinsic motivation for reading and comprehending text declined in middle school. Arlene Barry (1997) conducted a national survey and discovered significant reduction in reading services at high school level.

Researchers' Perspective of Local Context

Researcher One:

I have found students can read the words of text fairly easily. However, when asked questions about the material, they had no idea what they had read. This was especially obvious in special education classes because they needed even more instructions in improving reading comprehension skills. I see the future as being very difficult for students who do not have the skills to comprehend text. Consequently, if students did not attain skills for understanding/comprehending text, they would have difficulties functioning productively as an adult in the work force. A person who lacked these skills would also have difficulty in understanding simple directions for repairing things, cooking, and even traveling.

Researcher Two:

Many teens lack the skills of comprehending text. I believe that students should not have to struggle with understanding written material. I believe that it is possible for students, including those receiving special education, to improve their reading and comprehension skills. It is important that students understand what they read. If students do not learn to comprehend text, this could lead to low-self esteem and little interest in reading.

CHAPTER 2:

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The groups targeted for this research included a seventh grade, and a cross-categorical ninth through twelfth grade English class. These students received academic instructions in special education resource classes. The students were given opportunities to demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension skills. The results revealed difficulty in comprehending reading materials within appropriate grade levels. Evidence of this problem included student surveys and interviews, standardized test scores, teacher observations, and journaling.

A Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment was administered to the students during the second week of September. This assessment reflected the students' interest in reading, strengths, weaknesses, and attitudes toward reading (Appendix A). The assessment consisted of ratings ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. The assessment also included a column titled *"Undecided"* which allowed students to be flexible if they were indecisive.

The Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment was analyzed, focusing on six specific areas: Love to read, Reading a waste of time, Seldom buy book, Reading is boring, Seldom read, and Reads a lot, (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2). The results

revealed that 50% of the targeted seventh grade students loved to read compared to 55% of the targeted high school students. In the second area analyzed, 20% of the seventh graders indicated that reading was a waste of time compared to 14% of the high school students. Fifty percent of the seventh grade students and 57% of the high school students revealed that they seldom buy books. This was an indication that students who struggle with reading do not engage frequently in pleasure reading outside the school setting. Sixty percent of the seventh grade students and 57% of the high school students agreed that reading is boring. An astounding 80% of the seventh grade students revealed that they seldom read except when required. Forty three percent of the high school students seldom read. These responses suggest that infrequent readers lack essential exposure to text needed to become strong readers.

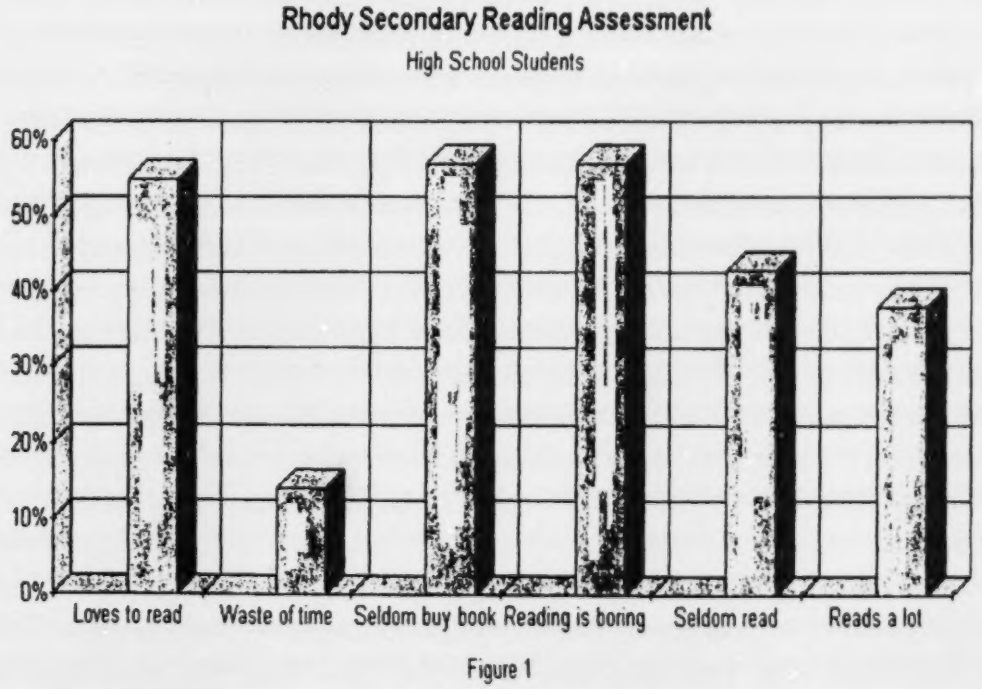

Figure 1: Rhody Secondary Reading Assessment of high school students.

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Twenty percent of the seventh grade students and 38% of the high school students indicated that they read a lot. Nineteen percent of the high school students were undecided as to whether or not they read a lot. Students need to be given opportunities to read either aloud or silently on a daily basis.

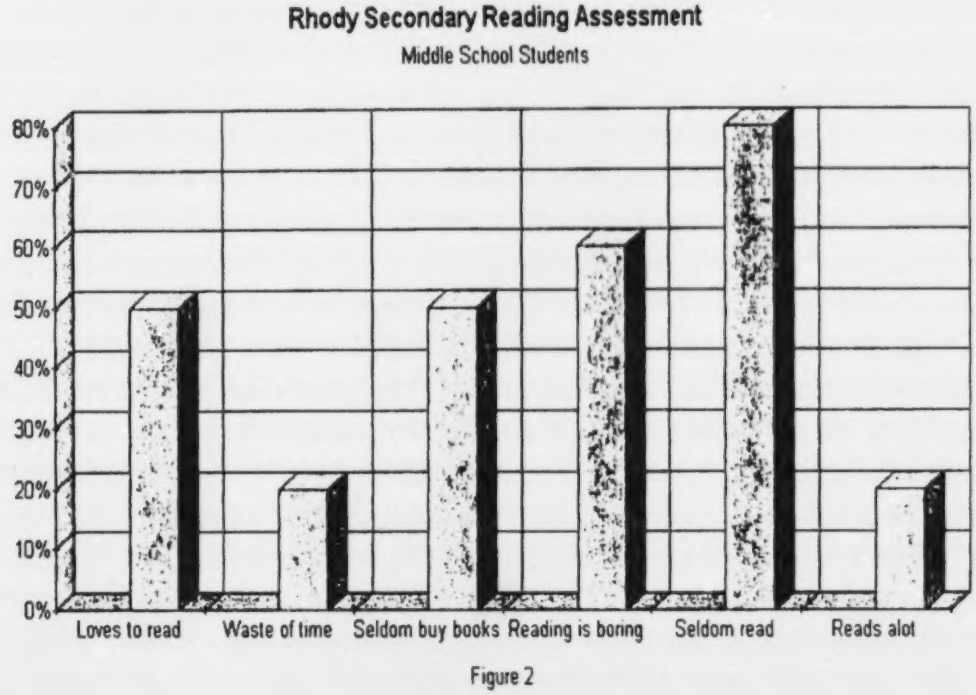

Figure 2: Rhody Secondary Reading Assessment of middle school students.

A Reading Interest Inventory was administered to both groups of students (Appendix B). The inventory focused on reading interest in areas of different types of stories and the most difficult facets of reading. Sixty percent of both groups of students preferred mystery, 15% preferred true stories, 10% preferred adventure/action, 10% preferred romance, and 5% preferred sports stories. The inventory revealed that the most difficult components of reading for students in both groups were reading out loud, decoding unfamiliar words, and remembering what was read.

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Table 1: The Gates/MacGinite Reading Placement Tests

Gates/MacGinite Placement Test Seventh Graders				Gates/MacGinite Placement Test High School Students			
Vocabulary (Meanings)	Grade Levels	Comprehension Skills	Grade Levels	Vocabulary (Meanings)	Grade Levels	Comprehension Skills	Grade Levels
33%	3rd	17%	2nd	33%	1st	33%	1st
50%	5th	33%	3rd	25%	2nd	25%	2nd
17%	7th	33%	5th	37%	4th	37%	4th
		17%	7th				

Gates/MacGinite Assessment (Appendix C) was administered as a pretest to provide a baseline of students' comprehension skills. The assessment included components of vocabulary (*word meaning*) and comprehension skills. The results of the seventh grade students vocabulary pretest indicated that 33% of the students scored at third grade level or below, 50% scored at the mid fifth grade level, and 17% scored at or above grade level. The results of the high school students vocabulary pretest indicated that 33% scored at first grade level, 25% scored at second grade level, and 37% scored at upper fourth grade level.

The results on the Gates/MaGinite pretest on comprehension skills indicated that 17% of the targeted seventh grade students scored at the upper second grade level. 33% of the students scored at upper third grade level. Thirty three percent of the students scored at the fifth grade level. The scores indicated that 17% of the students were at grade level.

Reading passage pretests were given to both groups of students. These passages focused on skills of identifying main idea, facts, words in context, details, and conclusions. The results indicated that 43% of the students identified main ideas in the passages. Words identification in context clues were identified by 57% of the students. Specific details were identified by 57% of the students on the pretests. The results for identification of the conclusion in the passages were identified by thirty eight percent. The results of these tests indicate that the students would benefit from instructions designed to enhance and improve reading comprehension skills.

The data reported were collected utilizing standardized tests, surveys/interviews, teacher observations, and comprehensive reading passages. These instruments supplied a baseline which provided evidence that the students did not function proficiently in the area of reading comprehension. A small percentage of the students, (17%), had acquired skills essential for comprehending text. The performance of 83% of the students indicated that they had been exposed to reading skills, but had not obtained a criteria level of mastery in decoding, identifying, or processing written text.

Probable Causes

One main concern in schools today is the illiteracy rate that exists in students throughout all grade levels. Literature suggested that major causes for the lack of proficient reading comprehension skills in middle and upper grades are credited to poor motivation, lack of experience, and egocentricity (Holloway, 1999). It was suggested in a study by Moat (2001), that older students who struggle with comprehension have a deficiency in linguistics. Underlying deficit in linguistics consisted of weaknesses in phonological processing, vocabulary and phrase meanings, word recognition, and reading experiences. Older students were expected to have the ability to read for information. The assumption of many teachers of middle and high school students was that students should have previously acquired the skills for learning to read. This assumption was not true for many students. According to Kurek (2000), older students could improve comprehension sufficiently by being provided reading strategies that centered around teaching them to interact with text. These strategies included strengthening background knowledge, organizing note taking, making connections, organizing information, and verbalizing confusing points. Students who found reading frustrating avoided the task of reading when possible.

In a study conducted by Daley (1999), it was noted that many older students had inadequate vocabulary, poor listening skills, lack of prior knowledge, inability to create mental pictures, and a lack of strategies to help strengthen reading skills. Green (2000) conveyed in a study that older students lacked skills to process and organize information. This supported the evidence cited by Daley that students who struggle with reading lack

the skill to create mental pictures while reading. Green further indicated that the average teacher is not provided the time needed to teach students specific strategies for strengthening reading skills. In middle and high schools, the focus of reading moves from reading to decode to reading to gather, analyze, interpret, and inferentiate information. Students who have not obtained the basic skills for reading sometimes get lost in the shuffle and struggle because they are stuck at a level of trying to decode and make sense of written words.

In a study conducted by Allen (2000), it was noted that the causes of poor reading skills and poor comprehension among significant numbers of middle and high school students was due to limited vocabulary, limited background knowledge, lack of fluency in reading, or minimal interest in the materials. Students needed to be provided the opportunities to choose what they read. They knew best about what they could and wanted to read. Being allowed opportunities to self-select reading materials was critical for students who had difficulty in reading because it served an initial point for learning to read and reading to learn (Castellani, 2001).

In order to make sense of written words, students must first obtain basic foundational reading skills. In a study done by Blunt (2000), it was noted that many older students had not obtained these skills which consisted of phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition. Often children end up in middle or high school with remediated reading skills that have not provided enough strategies to enable them to grasp specific concepts from materials read. Struggling readers often conveyed that the purpose of reading was to finish the book but got lost in the meaning beneath the words.

Reading comprehension difficulty among older students was a pervasive problem

especially among students with disabilities. Fuchs (1999), discussed the possibility of resource rooms setting up students with disabilities for failure because of oversized caseloads of students. He noted that teachers did not have the flexibility to work with students on an individual basis because they were required to provide services to too many students which prevented them from providing special individualized instructions. He also noted that the purpose of a special education program was to provide specific, directed, individualized, intensive, remedial instruction. His study indicated that teachers in resource rooms were ineffective and could not fulfill this purpose because of their class load. He also conveyed that classrooms needed to be structured, on a one-to one tutoring model, so that appropriate services might be provided to students receiving special education.

Neuman (1999), noted that students who struggle with reading, especially those in special programs, were typically provided low-level, fragmented skill instruction rather than opportunities to actually read. Fragmented skill instruction was described as actually causing a wider gap in students' ability to comprehend text by slowing the pace of instruction which resulted in students having fewer overall experiences with print. Students who struggled with reading needed to be given as many opportunities as possible to interact with written materials if they were expected to improve.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Many older students seem to be struggling with comprehending written text. They are in need of remedial intervention that would help empower them to become competent readers. It is necessary that students be enabled to function in today's ever-changing society and workforce by being equipped with the knowledge needed to comprehend written language. Students must have sufficient comprehension strategies and skills in order to understand written text and become productive and competitive adults.

A review of probable solution strategies suggested by researchers has resulted in possible solutions through interventions. The various instructional tools recommended for helping older students acquire the skills needed to comprehend text included Reading Workshop, Drama in Literature, Triarchic Model, Linguistic and phonetic instruction, Academic Literacy, Reciprocal Teaching techniques, SQ3R strategies, Technology, and Read 180. These various methods focused on strategies targeted for increasing background knowledge, vocabulary, linguistic and phonetic, listening, study, thinking, and metacognitive skills of students with poor reading abilities.

Specific strategies for improving reading skills as described by Green (2001), included instructions that focused on teaching students to interact with text. This

consisted of the implementation of the following basic reading strategies: drawing on background knowledge, utilizing the *What you know, What you want to know, and What you learned* (K-W-L) chart, read aloud- think aloud, organized notetaking, and QAR (question, answer, relationship). Green also noted that students must be provided an adequate amount of time for reading and interacting with text.

All of the above reading strategies noted by Green appeared to be sound strategies to use in helping students acquire comprehension skills. Implementation of these strategies will require a well-structured reading curriculum. These strategies will definitely be utilized in our research project.

Several interventional tools summarized by Allen (2000), included SQ3R, K-W-L chart, Academic Literacy, Reciprocal Teaching techniques, and SSR (silent sustained reading). SQ3R and K-W-L chart were reading strategies designed to help students think as they read. The Academic Literacy program entailed the implementation of an apprenticeship approach to reading utilizing personal, social, cognitive, and content materials for encouraging students to read. The Reciprocal Teaching techniques required students to predict, summarize, question, categorize, justify, and reexamine text until a clear understanding was apprehended. In addition, students were encouraged to develop metacognitive skills. Silent sustained reading (SSR) is an element of the Academic Literacy program which requires students to read independently and keep weekly logs of what was read. K-W-L charts and SQ3R strategies were utilized regularly throughout our action research project. However, the Academic Literacy program was not fully implemented because many students with learning disabilities function at low reading levels and possess very short attention spans.

Frase (2000), described an intervention method that consisted of a structured program that required to study and analyze story titles, search pages for clues, look for both important and difficult words, and bear in mind the settings of stories. This program was referred to as TELL. Reciprocal reading was also included. This intervention tool

consisted of cognitive strategies which required students to ask questions, predict conclusions, and explain events in passages. These strategies were utilized in our research project with the intention that students would make appropriate associations with what they read.

Literature data collected by Daley (1991), suggested that background knowledge, vocabulary, spelling, identification of words, and fluency skills should be taught utilizing a research-based program, Read 180, as an instructional tool for alleviating deficits in reading skills. This program is a combination of the Peabody Learning Lab software and a literacy workshop model. The Peabody Learning Lab is a computer-based program developed to help improve literacy. The reading workshop model of instruction is what drives the program. The implementation of this program requires daily 90-minute sessions. Although this reading program provides a systematic structure for implementing strategies targeted for helping students improve reading skills, it requires more time to implement daily than is allowed during one class period. However, elements of this program were utilized in our action research project.

A particular program, as described by Sternberg (2001), for improving reading comprehension skills included a Triarchic Model of Thinking. This consisted of instructional strategies constructed to promote analytical, creative, and practical cognitive thinking skills of students who struggled with comprehending text. Analytical thinking promotes the ability to judge, evaluate, compare and contrast, and analyze. Creative thinking promotes the ability to be imaginative, creative, and inventive. Practical thinking promotes the ability of applying, implementing, using, and practicing learned skills. Sternberg suggested that these higher-level thinking skills be implemented in addition to basic strategies used for building vocabulary, improving spelling, and improving reading.

Castellani, (2001), described a computer-based program designed to help teachers provide literacy instructions to students through the use of the Internet. The Internet supplied text that teachers could alter by adding many different types of speech

synthesizers. Some instructional tools found on the Internet that provided enormous amount of curriculum materials were text-reading software, word-prediction software, and visual concept-organization software. The Internet also included such features as graphics, sounds, video, and animation which is created to help motivate students and enlighten literacy instructions (See Figure 1).

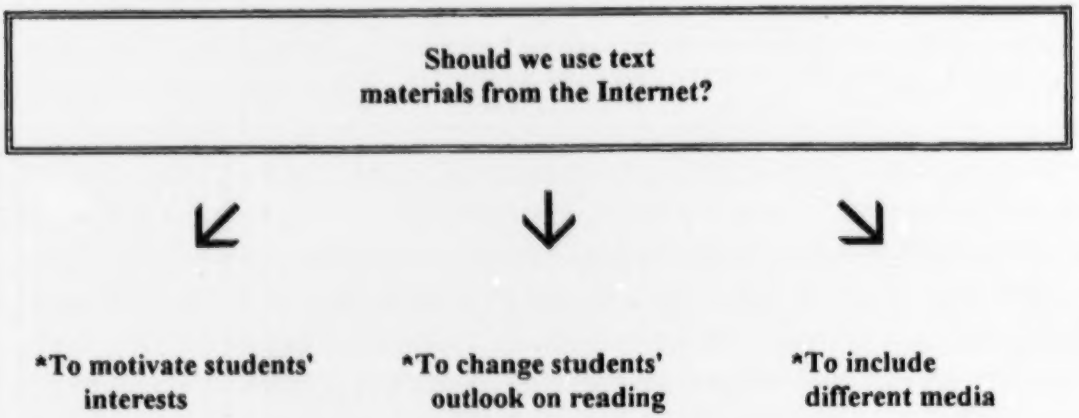

Should we use text materials from the Internet?
*To motivate students' interests
*To change students' outlook on reading
*To include different media

Figure 1

Castellani noted that it is important to use interest inventories so curriculum can be both interesting and motivating.

Technology is an outstanding asset in education today as discussed by Schetz (2000), of a program called TOARR (Technology Option for At-Risk Readers). This program is designed to provide a more individualized reading curriculum for students, focusing mainly on lower grades (K-5). This program requires that students have access to the computers in the classroom. This program will not be possible to implement due to the lack of availability of computers in the classrooms. Our action research project did not include the TOARR program.

Intervention reading strategies, suggested by Wasserstein (2001), consisted of three stages of reading instructions; prereading, during reading, and postreading.

Prereading stage was designed to prepare students to look for specific information and patterns. Graphic organizers should be used in the stages of *during reading* and *post reading* to help students decipher, separate, and catagorize information read. Pearson & Johnson (1972), believed that students should be challenged with both literal and inferential questions in order to build greater comprehension skills because students will often read when given a purpose to do so. Our action research project included these strategies.

Moat (2001), suggested research-based reading strategies for older students that addressed all stages of reading development. The stages included expanding phonological skills and decoding, increasing reading fluency and word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Phonological awareness and decoding skills should be taught to older students as a linguistic course. Increasing reading fluency and word recognition should be implemented using instructions that include sound-symbol association, reading words in isolation, and reading text material of high-interest level. The strategies utilized for building vocabulary should include using content to define unfamiliar words. Strategies for increasing comprehension should include instruction in grammar, sentence structure, phrases, and understanding text. Moat further commented that older students must acquire the skills missed in primary grades in order to effectively comprehend text.

A reading workshop approach, as described by Towle (2000), consisted of five components: teacher sharing time, focus lessons, state-of-the-class conference, self-selected reading and responding, and student sharing time. The first two components, teacher sharing time and focus lesson should be conducted in a short period of time, (5-10 minutes), with the teacher setting the pace and expectations for the daily session. State-of-the-class conference should be conducted daily, consisting of assigning individual activities to students. During self-selected reading and responding time (40-60 minutes), students should read and engage in written responses to text. During sharing time (5-10

minutes), students should share with the entire class either book read or activity performed.

This workshop-based reading program required an average of 90 minutes daily for implementation and for students to fully engage in all components of the workshop. Towle suggested that elements of this reading workshop could easily be implemented in regular literature classes. This program is more suitable for lower grades and was not implemented in our research project mainly because of time constraints.

A reading program, as described by McMaster (1999), explored the use of drama as a strategic tool for developing adequate reading comprehension skills of older students. McMaster noted that students lacked decoding knowledge, reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and metacognitive knowledge needed for comprehension. Drama was used in activities to help improve decoding skills, vocabulary skills, and metacognitive skills. Dramatization was used by students while reading books to promote thinking skills which included inventing, generating, speculating, sequencing, analyzing, and judging. Implementation of this strategy required students to role play, create mental images, analyze events, and reflect on self thoughts and feelings. McMaster noted, "Drama is an invaluable tool for educators because it is one of the few vehicles of instruction that can support every aspect of literacy development."

The concept of using drama as an intervention tool for helping students improve reading comprehension skills provides a different approach. It can be easily integrated into a regular reading/literature curriculum. This strategy was utilized in our action research project.

TABLE 1: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING SKILLS

ACTION RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

↓

Stage 1: Administer Reading Survey

↓

Stage II: Analyze Individual Reading Survey

↓

Stage III: Introduce Strategic Interventions

*Building vocabulary skills	*Implementing Study Skills	*Developing Metacognition

↓

Stage IV: Assessment Tools

* Teacher-made Test	* Rubric	*Graphic Organizers

↓

Stage V: Evaluate Effectiveness of Interventions

* Daily Journal PMI	* Weekly Monitoring of Progress	*Monthly Monitoring of Progress

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of being provided efficient and effective strategies to help improve reading deficit, students in the middle and high school settings will increase their reading comprehension skills. Evidence will be collected through the use of teacher observation, teacher rubric, K-W-L, graphic organizers, and teacher-made tests.

As a result of providing explicit reading comprehension strategies, the researchers will gain a better awareness of how students process information and which strategies are most effective. To accomplish the project objective, strategies to improve study skills, vocabulary skills, and metacognitive skills will be implemented over a period of thirteen weeks.

1. Strategies for improving study skills will involve the use of SQ3R method to help students organize their thought process.
2. Strategies for improving vocabulary skills will consist of students using dictionaries, context clues, and syllabic decoding to define unfamiliar words. Integrating strategic ways to identify and define words into the reading comprehension unit will provide students the opportunity to strengthen reading comprehension in other courses of study.
3. Strategies for improving metacognitive skills will consist of K-W-L chart, QAR, read aloud-think aloud, choice reading, and cooperative reading and sharing.

Project Action Plan

This project is designed to enhance students' reading comprehension skills. Strategic reading skill building activities will begin September 11, 2001, and conclude December 07, 2001. The following activities will be integrated into the existing classroom curriculum.

Project Action Plan

Week One:

* Introduce reading survey/interview
* Administer reading survey/interview
* Discuss the results of survey with students individually

Week Two:

* Introduce strategies for improving vocabulary skills (use of dictionary, content clues, and word recognition)
* Model skill of content clues using short passage
* Guided practice on using content clues

Week Three:

* Cooperative reading
* Dictionary activity (5 to 10 unfamiliar words)
* Writing activity using unfamiliar words

Week Four:

* Introduce and complete first two sections of the K-W-L chart
* Introduce strategies to improve study skills (SQ3R)
* Model SQ3R activities
* Guided practice on using SQ3R method for reading

Week Five:

* Continue SQ3R activities (Guided practice)
* Independent reading activity using SQ3R
* Cooperative group discussion

Week Six:

* Study skills activities review
* Administer teacher-made test

Week Seven:

* Read short story/passage
* Complete comprehension worksheet
* Think-pair-share activity

Week Eight:

* Review study strategies (SQ3R)
* Complete the K-W-L chart
* Class discussion K-W-L chart and study strategies

Week Nine:

* Introduce strategies to improve metacognitive (thinking) skills
* Complete graphic organizers to help organize thought process
* Introduce the strategy of using "Drama activities"

Week Ten:

* Orally read literature based material
* Use dramatization of important information
* Complete self-questioning worksheets
* Think-pair-share activity

Week Eleven:

* Continue drama activities (mental imaging)
* Orally read play (each student will become a character)
* Students perform "Stretching the Imagination Game"
* Administer quiz on the play

Week Twelve:

* Read short story
* Complete graphic organizer
* Write summary of story
* Cooperative/class group discussion of summary

Week Thirteen:

* Review reading comprehension strategies
* Administer teacher-made test (reading passage)

Methods of Assessment

Teacher observation, teacher rubric, K-W-L, graphic organizers, and teacher-made tests will be used to assess the effects of the intervention. These methods of assessment will present evidence for determination of improvement in students reading comprehension skills.

Weekly Journal

Pluses, Minuses, Interesting (PMI) chart will be used for weekly journal reflections. A journal log also be will used to further reflections of daily activities.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The purpose of this project was to improve students reading comprehension skills. Several strategies were presented as remediation tools to help strengthen essential skills needed in order to obtain better understanding of written text. These intervention strategies were integrated into the curriculum and consisted of improving vocabulary skills, background knowledge, study skills, thinking skills, metacognitive skills, and direct instruction of reading comprehension skills.

The first week of this project began with a survey of each students' background in reading. This was accomplished by gathering information from students through the use of interviews and completion of a reading inventory. The results of this survey indicated that most students possessed weak backgrounds in reading and in interacting with text. Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests were administered to determine the students present grade level in vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Reading passage pretests were administered to the students. These passages focused on skills of identifying the main idea, facts, words in context, details, and conclusions.

During the next three weeks, strategies to improve vocabulary were implemented. These strategies consisted of building vocabulary by defining unfamiliar words through the use of the dictionary, context clues, and word recognition. The reading materials consisted of short passages and short stories in which the students were required to locate and highlight ten unfamiliar words, define those words independently and consult the dictionary to confirm the definitions. The students created personal dictionaries for the purpose of obtaining an anecdotal record of these additional vocabulary words. These words were reviewed periodically throughout the project.

During weeks five, six, and seven, strategies were implemented to improve study skills. These strategies included the implementation of SQ3R (study, question, read, review, and recite), a K-W-L chart, increasing background knowledge, read aloud-think aloud, and organized note taking. These strategies focused on improving students skills in summarizing, predicting, and re-examining text as they read in order to gain a clearer understanding. Geography and science books were used for the implementation of these study skills in order to survey, ask questions, read, recite, and review information in chapter books. Students read a chapter in the geography book about the people, land, economic, government, and recreation of people who lived in Canada. Students utilized the study skills while engaged in studying a chapter in the science book on endangered species. A teacher-made comprehension test was administered at the end of the week to determine the effectiveness of these strategies.

In order to improve students' interaction with text, week eight was designated for implementing interventional techniques that focused on utilizing skills that required

students to interact with text. These strategies included improving pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading skills. During pre-reading instructions, students examined the titles of materials, illustrations, sub-headings, and made predictions prior to reading. Several types of graphic organizers were utilized during the implementation of during-reading and post-reading activities. These graphic organizers were used for gathering, separating, and categorizing information.

During the ninth, tenth, and eleventh week of this project, students engaged in learning and practicing skills that targeted improving metacognitive skills. Promoting metacognitive skills consisted of students forming opinions, inserting values, beliefs, and feelings, and gaining an understanding of how they learn. Drama was used in literature reading. Students read plays from the Scope, Read, and Action magazines. Students role- played different characters. They created mental images while role-playing and expressed self-thoughts and feelings of the events and characters portrayed. The main objective of the drama was to help improve vocabulary skills, decoding skills, and metacognitive skills.

Thinking strategies included promoting analytical, creative, and practical thinking skills. Instructions in analytical thinking included empowering students to utilize Venn diagrams to engage in activities that involved analyzing information through the skills of comparing and contrasting, problems/solutions, and facts/opinions. Passages from the 88 Passage Comprehension Series were included in these activities. Instructions for creative thinking consisted of increasing the ability to be imaginative and creative. Drama was used in literature reading in order to promote creative thinking. Instructions for

practical thinking skills targeted promoting students' ability to engage in higher order thinking. Higher order thinking consisted of applying, generating, and practicing learned reading comprehension skills.

Also included in the thinking skill strategies was the implementation of a structured program that presented techniques for analyzing story titles, identifying events, looking at difficult words, looking at main character, identifying settings. This program was referred to as TELL. The main focus of these techniques mainly was to help students make associations with what they read. Students read materials from literature books and 88 Passages Comprehension Series in order to employ and acquire these strategies into reading activities. At the end of the eleventh week, another teacher-made comprehension test was administered to determine the existence of any significant and measurable growth in students' comprehension skills.

Review and continual practice of all the strategies implemented to increase reading comprehension skills was delegated to the twelfth and thirteenth weeks of the project. Throughout this two-week period, students participated in reading activities that required them to utilize all the intervention strategies and techniques previously presented. These ranged from instructions in increasing vocabulary to promoting thinking skills. At the end of the thirteenth week, several tests were administered to measure students' level of reading comprehension.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the growth of reading comprehension skills, students were administered several posttests which consisted of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests and 88 Passages Comprehension Series tests. The Gates-MacGinitie tests measured students' grade level in vocabulary and overall reading comprehension skills. The 88 Passages Comprehension tests targeted specific comprehension skills of identifying main ideas, characters, significant events/details, sequencing, and conclusions.

The results in Figures 3 - 6 indicate gains in both vocabulary and comprehension skills of the targeted middle school students on the Gates MacGinite Reading Tests. As noted on the pie graphs, 17% of students tested at the third grade level on the vocabulary skill test, compared to 33% of students on the pretest. Seventeen percent of students tested at the fifth grade level, compared to 50% of students on the pretest. There was an increase in the number of students who tested above the fifth grade level on the vocabulary posttest. Seventeen percent of students tested at sixth grade level. Thirty three percent of students tested at the seventh grade level. Seventeen percent of students tested at the eight grade level.

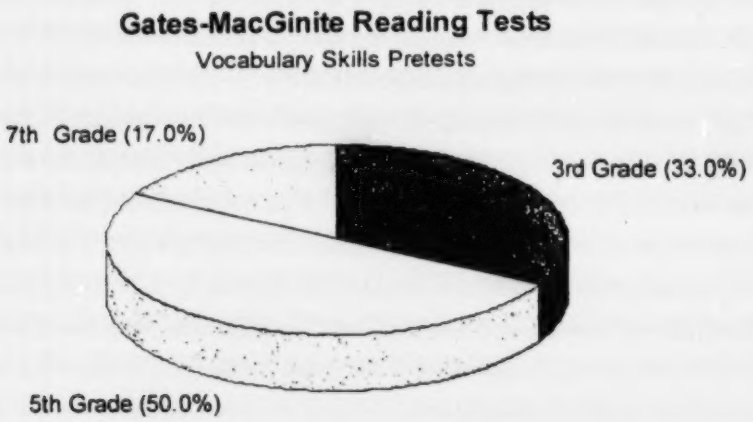


Figure 3: Results of middle students vocabulary skills pretest.

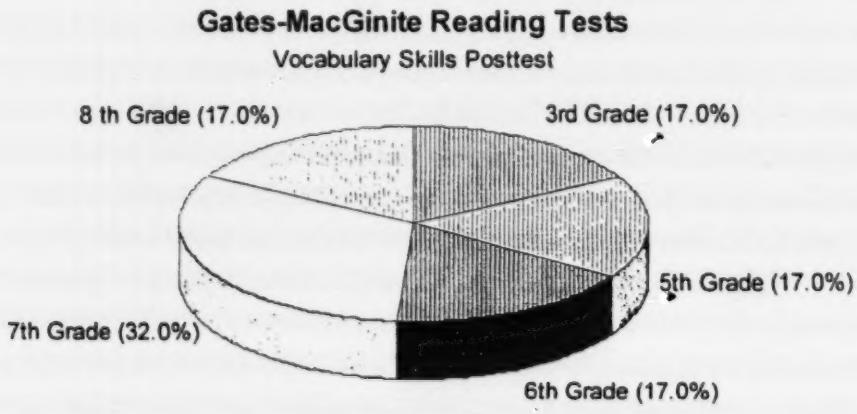


Figure 4: Results of middle school students vocabulary skills posttest.

The results of the comprehension test indicated that of the targeted middle school students, 17% tested at the third grade level, compared to 17% who pretested at the second grade level. Thirty three percent of the students tested at the fourth grade level. Seventeen percent of the students tested at the fifth grade level compared to 33% of students on the pretest. Seventeen percent of students tested at eighth grade level, compared to 17% who tested at the seventh grade level. (See Figures 5 & 6 below).

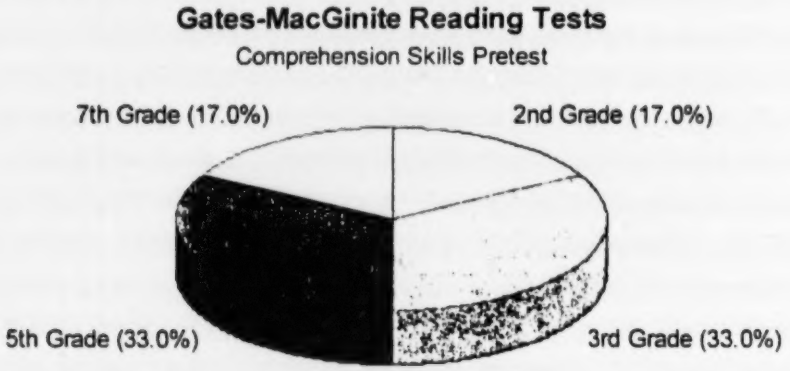


Figure 5: Results of middle school students reading comprehension pretest.

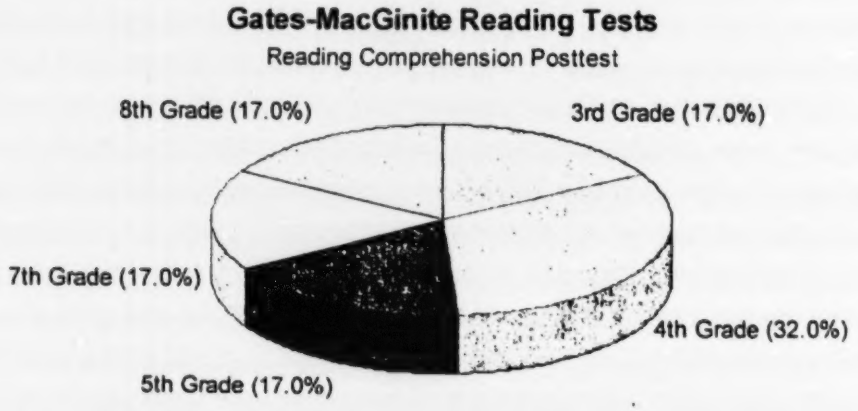
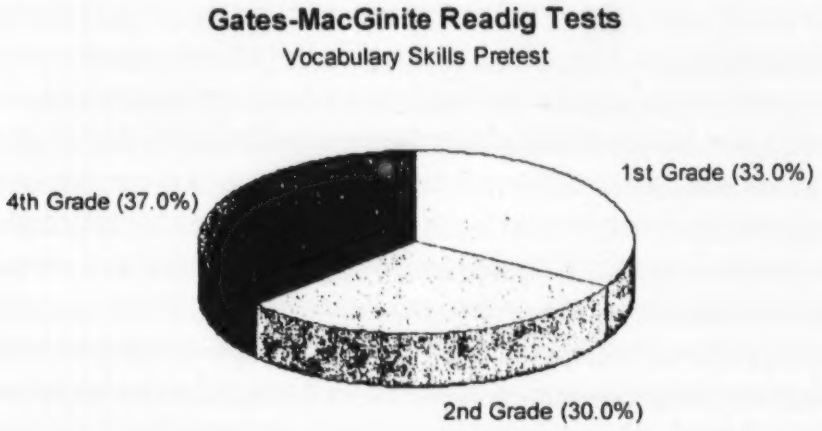


Figure 6: Results of middle school students reading comprehension posttest.

The results in Figures 7-10 indicated gain in both vocabulary and comprehension skills of the targeted high school students on the Gate-MacGinite Reading Tests. According to the analyzed information, 43% of the students tested at third grade level on vocabulary skills, compared to 33% who tested at the first grade level on the pretest. Forty three percent of the students tested at the fourth grade level, compared to 30% who pretested at the second grade level. Fourteen percent of the students tested at the fifth grade level, compared to 37% who pretested at the fourth grade level.



Figures 7: Results of high school students vocabulary skills pretest.

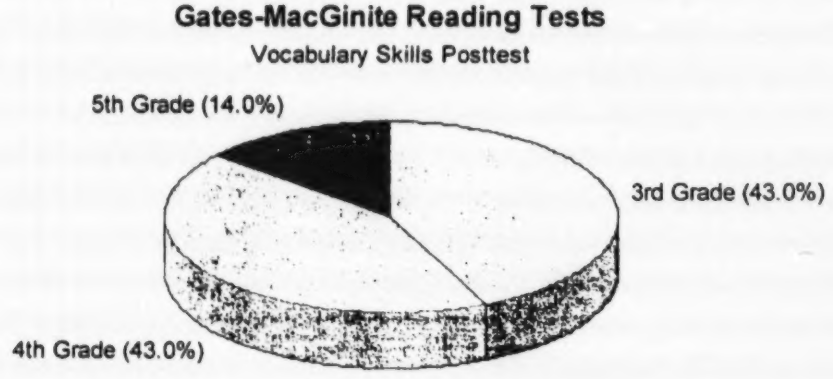


Figure 8: Results of high school students vocabulary skills posttest.

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The results of the high school students reading comprehension pretest indicated that 57% of the students tested at the third grade level, compared to 33% who tested at first grade level on the pretest. Twenty nine percent of the students tested at the fourth grade level, compared to 30% of students who tested at second grade level on the pretest. Fourteen percent of the students tested at fifth grade level, compared to 37% of students who tested at fourth grade level on the pretest.

The results of the Gates-MacGinite vocabulary skills posttest indicated an average increase of one grade level, ranging from third grade to fifth grade, compared to pretest grade levels ranging from first grade to fourth grade. The comprehension skills portion of the posttest indicate an average increase of 1.5 grade level, ranging from third grade to fifth grade, compared to grade levels ranging from first to fourth on the pretest. The analysis of the high school students posttest indicated a significant increase in both vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. The following graphs compared results of the pretest to those of the posttest.

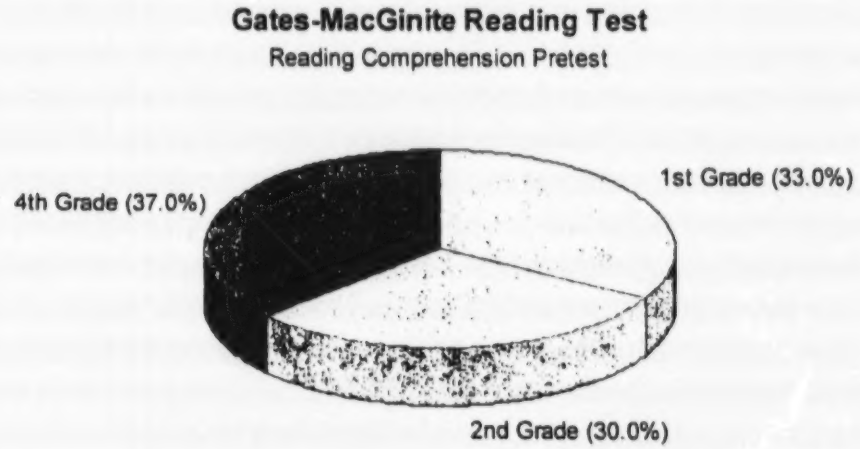

Figure 9: Results of the high school students reading comprehension skills pretest.

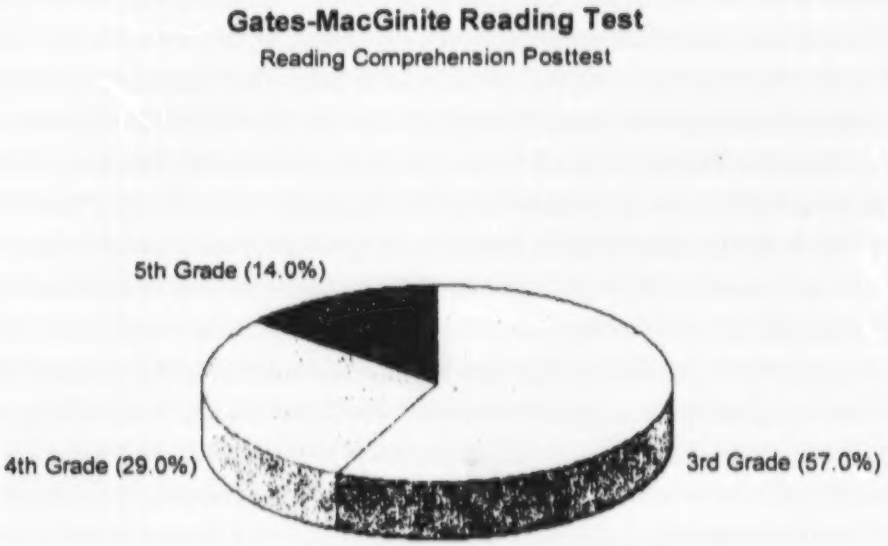

Figure 10: **Results of high school students reading comprehension skills posttest.**

In order to further assess the growth of students' comprehension skills, students completed a posttest to measure and compare growth in recognizing facts, details, words in context, main ideas, and conclusions of reading materials. Three reading passages from the 88 Passages Comprehension Series were administered to the high school and middle school students. Figure 11 shows that out of a total of 21 students, 9% identified facts in one passage, 43% identified facts in two passages, 24% identified facts in all three passages, and 24% were unable to identify facts in any of the three passages. Before the intervention, 52% of the students identified facts in only one passage, 19% identifies facts in two passages, and 29% were unable to identify facts in any of the three passages.

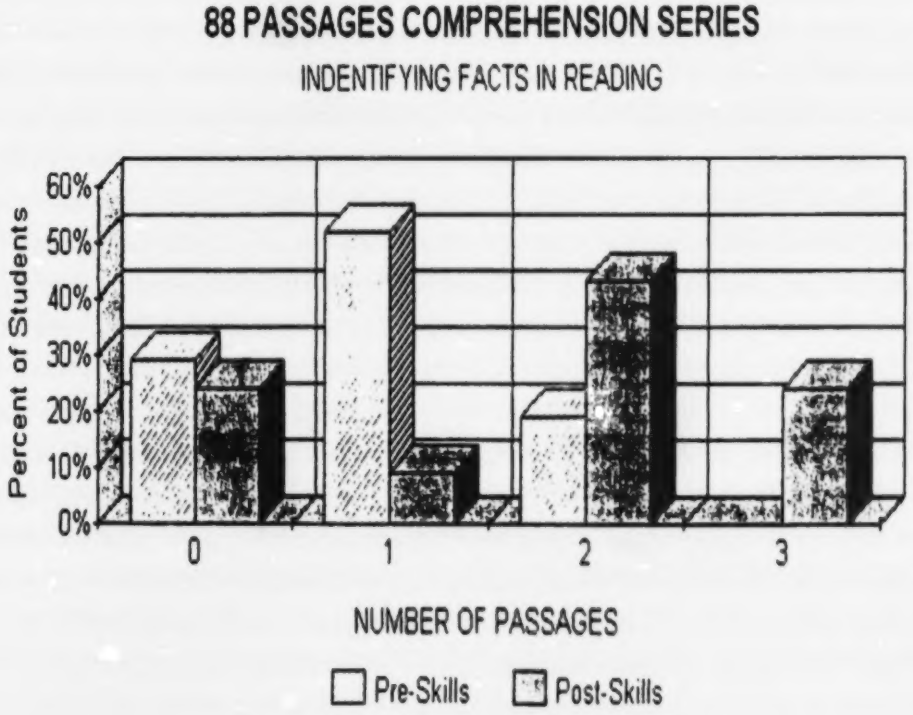

Figure 11: Identifying facts in reading.

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There was a significant increase in the percentage of students who identified facts in two and three passages. Prior to intervention, none of the students were able to identify facts in all three passages. There was a decrease from 29% to 24 % of students who did not identify any facts in the three passages.

Compared to earlier results, Figure 12 shows that after intervention, 33% of the total 21 students identified details in one passage, 24% identified details in two passages, and 43% identified details in all three passages. Prior to the intervention, 43% of the students identified details in one passage, 14% identified details in two passages, and 43% were unable to identify details in any of the three passages.

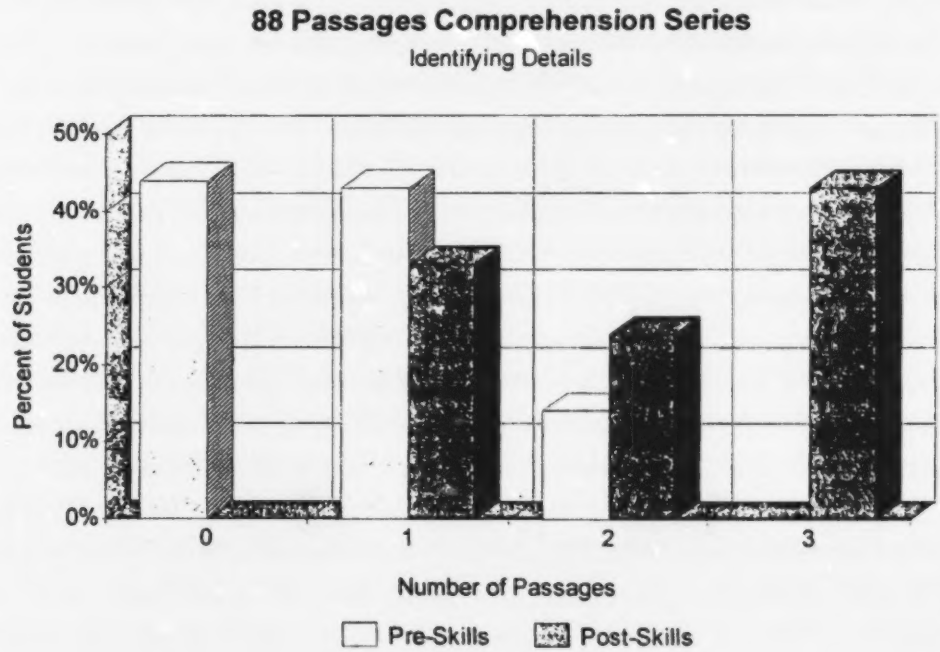

Figure 12: Identifying details in reading.

Figure 13, shows a comparison of the results of students' word identification skills before and after intervention. Prior to the intervention, 19% of the total 21 students identified at least 80% of the specified words in context, 38% identified at least 50%, and 43% identified less than 50% of the specified words in context. After the intervention, 53% of the students identified 80% of the words, 33% identified at least 50% of the words, and 50% of the students identified less than 50% of the words in context.

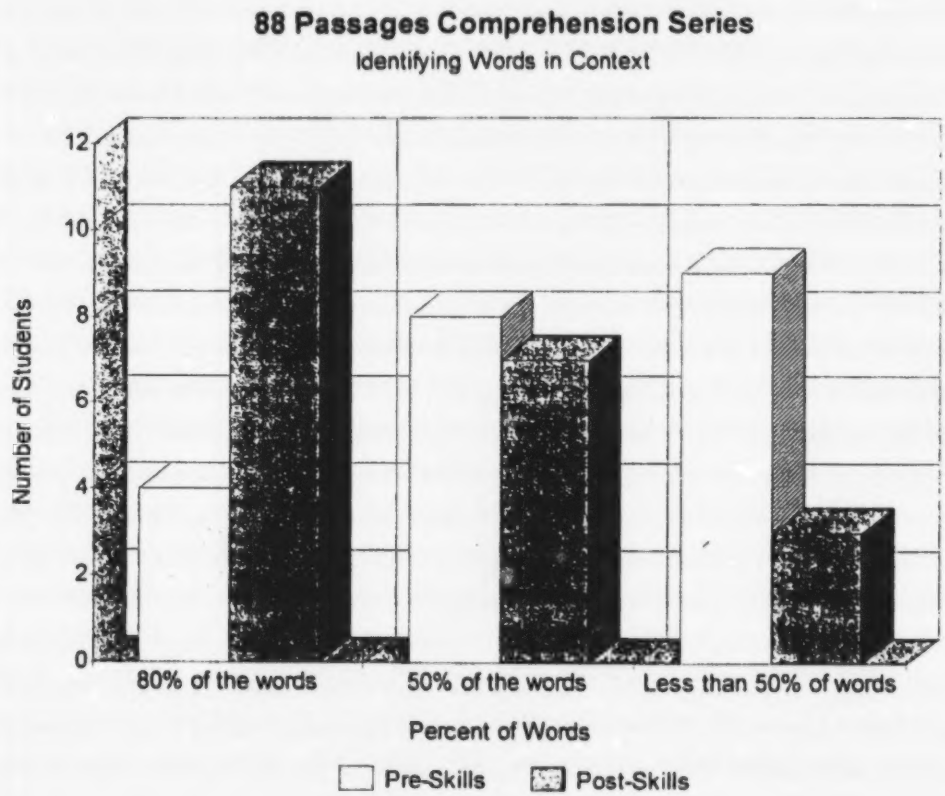

Figure 13: Identifying words in context.

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There was an increase in the number of students who identified at least 80% of the words in context within the three passages. Consequently, there was a 5% decrease in the number of students who identified at least 50% of the words, and a 29% decrease in the number of students who identified less than 50% of the words in context.

Figure 14 illustrates that after the intervention, 28% of the students identified the main idea in one passage compared to 43% of the students prior to the intervention. Twenty four percent of the students identified the main idea in two passages, 24% in three passages, and 24% of the students were unable to identify the main idea in any of the three passages compared to 57% of the students prior to the intervention.

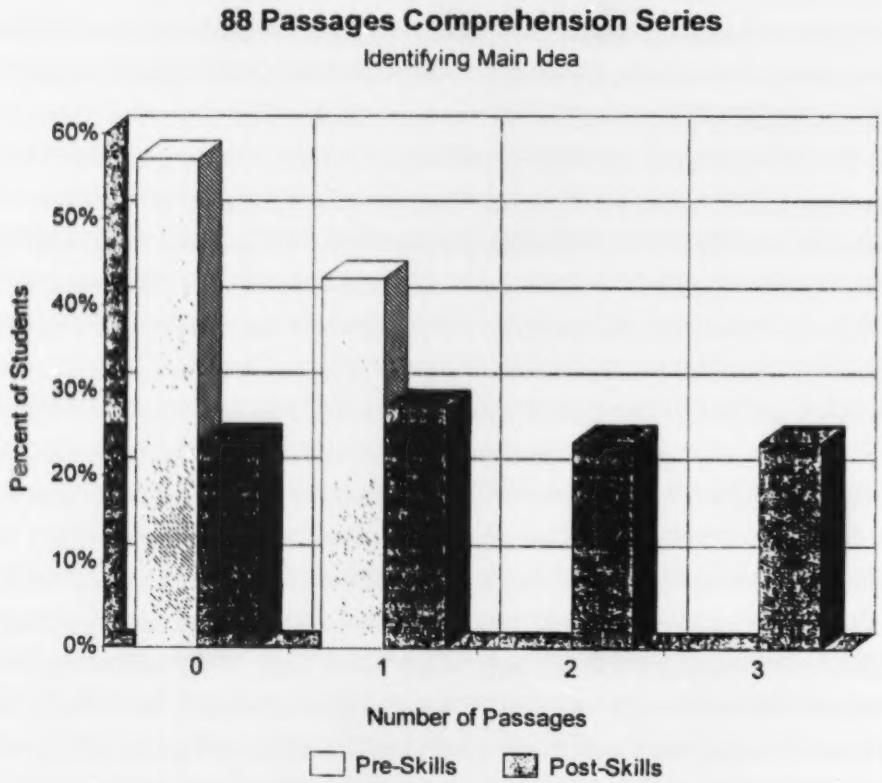

Figure 14: Identifying main ideas in reading.

The posttest on identifying the main ideas in reading materials indicated an increase in the number of students who identified the main ideas in two or three passages prior to the intervention.

A comparison of students' skills in identifying the conclusion of a passage before and after the intervention is illustrated in Figure 15. Prior to the intervention, 24% of the total students identified the conclusion in one out of three passages. Fourteen percent of the students identified conclusions in two of the passages. Sixty two percent of the students were unable to identify the main idea in any of the three passages.

Figure 15 illustrates posttest results which indicated that 19% of the students identified the conclusion in one passage, 48% in two passages, and 33% were unable to identify conclusions in any of the passages.

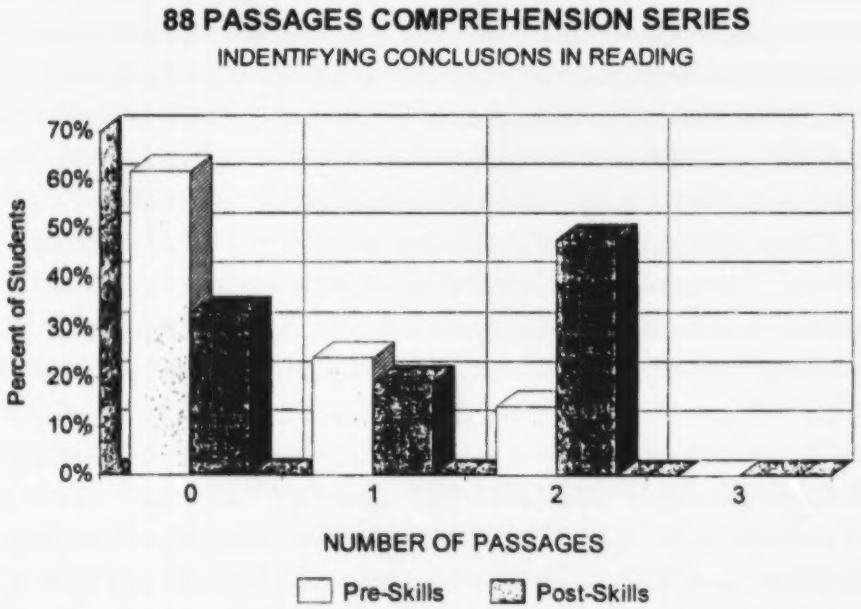

Figure 15: Identifying conclusions in reading.

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Post intervention results indicated that there was an increase in the students' skills of identifying conclusions in reading passages. There was a 34% increase in the number of students who identified the conclusion in two passages. The intervention resulted in 100% of the students being able to identify the conclusion in at least one passage.

The Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment was administered after the intervention to determine whether students had acquired a different outlook toward reading. The results of the high school and middle school students were combined in order to get an overview of their thoughts toward reading after the intervention. The results of the post reading attitude assessment indicated that of the combined 21 students, 53% noted that they love to read. This was a total of eleven students. The percent of students who love to read did not change from the previous assessment. The results of students who indicated that they thought that reading was a waste of time was 24% after the intervention compared to 19% previously. There was an increase of one student who agreed that reading was a waste of time. This increase may be an indication that some older students who struggle with reading still find learning to read difficult even with structured intervention strategies.

The results of the post reading attitude assessment indicated that 48% of the 21 students (ten students) seldom buy books compared to the previous assessment of 53% of the students. The fourth portion of the post attitude assessment compared the students thoughts on whether reading is boring. Of the 21 students, 38% (eight students) indicated that reading is boring compared to 57% (twelve students) previously. A total of nine

students, 43%, indicated that they read a lot compared to 29% of students who indicated they read a lot before the intervention. An increase of three students noted that they have increased the amount of time spent reading than before the intervention. Due to the increase in students who indicated that they read more after the intervention, there was a decrease in the number of students who indicated that they seldom read. The post results of students who seldom read was 43% after the intervention compared to 62% previously. This was a decrease of four students who have increased the amount of reading time.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluations and analysis of the targeted students data in this research revealed an increase in the overall performance of the reading comprehension skills. Students showed an improvement in identifying facts, details, main ideas, words in context, and conclusions. The statistics of these results were based on a percentage scale. However, there were students who individually showed little or no improvement in reading comprehension skills. There are many reasons that could have contributed to these students' lacking a significant growth in comprehension skills. A few reasons may include students' lack of motivation toward learning, lack of interest, lack of confidence, and lack of adequate background knowledge. It appears that students often seek other interests beside learning as they reach their teens. Sometimes, they seem to be spending more time engaged in things that are not school related than engaged in academic studies.

Although there were noted improvements in the students' reading comprehension

skills, the length of this research provided enough time for students to just begin to learn and apply strategies involved in improving reading comprehension and not to learn these strategies in-depth or to a point of ownership. Consequently, the duration of the research was less than half of the school year. The period of time to implement the intervention could be extended by applying the intervention and research study an additional one to two full school years.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Sample of Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment

Directions: This is a test to tell how you feel about reading. The score will not affect grade in any way. You read the statements silently as I read them aloud. put an ☒ on the box under the letter or letters that represent how you about the statement.

SD = Strongly Disagree
D = Disagree
U = Undecided
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

	SD	D	U	A
1. You feel you have better things to do than read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. You seldom buy a book.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. You are willing to tell people that you do not like to read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. You have a lot of books in your room at home.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. You like to read a book whenever you have free time.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. You get really excited about books you have read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. You love to read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. You like to read books by well-known authors.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. You never check out a book from the library.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. You like to stay at home and read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. You seldom read except when you have to do a book report.	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. You think reading is a waste of time.	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. You think reading is boring.	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. You think people are strange when they read a lot.	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. You like to read to escape from problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. You make fun of people who read a lot.	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. You like to share books with your friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. You would rather someone just tell you information so that you won't have to read to get it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. You hate reading.	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. You generally check out a book when you go to the library.	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. It takes you a long time to read a book.	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. You like to broaden your interests through reading.	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. You read a lot.	☐	☐	☐	☐
24. You like to improve your vocabulary so you can use more words.	☐	☐	☐	☐
25. You like to get books for gifts.	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Appendix B
Sample of Reading Interest Inventory

What do you like best about reading?

Do you like to read out loud in class?

Do you like to have others read to you?

What is the most difficult part of reading for you?

Write the name of a book you have read._____

Name a book you would like to read with the class. _____

What kind of story would you like to read?

Number the following 1 to 5. Number 1 is your top favorite kind of book to read and number 5 is something that is your least favorite to read.

Mystery _____

Romance _____

Adventure/Action _____

True stories _____

Sports _____

1. equal
   - (A) added
   - (B) plural
   - (C) first
   - (D) same
   - (E) hard-won

2. glow
   - (F) frown
   - (G) shine
   - (H) lower
   - (I) mist
   - (J) smoke

3. emotion
   - (A) movement
   - (B) smoothness
   - (C) feeling
   - (D) convention
   - (E) comfort

4. improper
   - (F) not supported
   - (G) not suitable
   - (H) impressed
   - (I) childish
   - (J) personal

5. locality
   - (A) season
   - (B) size
   - (C) slowness
   - (D) place
   - (E) loudness

6. texture
   - (F) surface grain
   - (G) combination
   - (H) lesson
   - (I) frame
   - (J) script

7. violate
   - (A) ease
   - (B) delay
   - (C) accept
   - (D) sue
   - (E) break

8. vital
   - (F) greasy
   - (G) royal
   - (H) medical
   - (I) essential
   - (J) visible

9. lullaby
   - (A) song
   - (B) sleep
   - (C) stop
   - (D) mammal
   - (E) cloak

10. data
    - (F) proof
    - (G) small pieces
    - (H) information
    - (I) calendar
    - (J) machinery

11. narrate
    - (A) make narrow
    - (B) estimate
    - (C) perform
    - (D) create
    - (E) tell

12. vary
    - (F) differ
    - (G) compare
    - (H) increase
    - (I) air out
    - (J) pray

13. salvage
    - (A) float
    - (B) fit together
    - (C) moisten
    - (D) barbarian
    - (E) save

14. festivity
    - (F) sore
    - (G) holiness
    - (H) rejoicing
    - (I) harvest
    - (J) birth

15. accuracy
    - (A) boldness
    - (B) aim
    - (C) exactness
    - (D) point
    - (E) time

16. confidential
    - (F) sealed
    - (G) shameful
    - (H) evident
    - (I) positive
    - (J) private

17. massive
    - (A) heavy
    - (B) dangerous
    - (C) unfriendly
    - (D) strained
    - (E) military

18. pursue
    - (F) watch
    - (G) chase
    - (H) scowl
    - (I) demand
    - (J) accuse

Vocabulary

19. worthy
   - (A) ancient
   - (B) good
   - (C) worldly
   - (D) prosperous
   - (E) deep

20. abrupt
   - (F) above
   - (G) ragged
   - (H) tense
   - (I) sudden
   - (J) hot

21. transact
   - (A) mark out
   - (B) carry out
   - (C) vanish
   - (D) damage
   - (E) train

22. enlarge
   - (F) magnify
   - (G) stress
   - (H) size up
   - (I) photograph
   - (J) screen

23. ravage
   - (A) grow old
   - (B) sell quickly
   - (C) scream
   - (D) destroy
   - (E) hospitalize

24. vacate
   - (F) amuse
   - (G) seal off
   - (H) tear down
   - (I) travel
   - (J) leave

25. truce
   - (A) tiny bit
   - (B) cease-fire
   - (C) flag
   - (D) honesty
   - (E) comb

26. velocity
   - (F) speed
   - (G) capacity
   - (H) wind
   - (I) crowd
   - (J) meanness

27. frenzy
   - (A) closeness
   - (B) dismay
   - (C) wildness
   - (D) piracy
   - (E) ritual

28. opponent
   - (F) power
   - (G) neighbor
   - (H) plumpness
   - (I) flavor
   - (J) foe

29. reminiscence
   - (A) proportion
   - (B) miniature
   - (C) criticism
   - (D) memory
   - (E) shimmer

30. evade
   - (F) evaporate
   - (G) shadow
   - (H) alternate
   - (I) protect
   - (J) avoid

31. comply
   - (A) decline
   - (B) compound
   - (C) obey
   - (D) fold over
   - (E) back up

32. effective
   - (F) diseased
   - (G) capable
   - (H) tough
   - (I) busy
   - (J) noticed

33. serene
   - (A) sung
   - (B) unknown
   - (C) powerful
   - (D) calm
   - (E) green

34. gauge
   - (F) choke
   - (G) alter
   - (H) measure
   - (I) cough
   - (J) carve out

35. belligerent
   - (A) hostile
   - (B) musical
   - (C) immigrant
   - (D) stiff-legged
   - (E) defensive

36. congruent
   - (F) numbered
   - (G) central
   - (H) conscious
   - (I) agreeing
   - (J) courageous

Vocabulary

37. entice
   - (A) lace
   - (B) scratch
   - (C) lure
   - (D) deceive
   - (E) hold back

38. moderate
   - (F) extra
   - (G) scold
   - (H) fashionable
   - (I) up-to-date
   - (J) not extreme

39. devastation
   - (A) settlement
   - (B) auction
   - (C) ruin
   - (D) miracle
   - (E) radio wave

40. robust
   - (F) healthy
   - (G) broken
   - (H) stolen
   - (I) young
   - (J) true

41. casualty
   - (A) indifference
   - (B) victim
   - (C) reason
   - (D) statistics
   - (E) strategy

42. obstinacy
   - (F) fate
   - (G) shame
   - (H) roughness
   - (I) stubbornness
   - (J) obituary

43. drawl
   - (A) pour off
   - (B) speak slowly
   - (C) drift away
   - (D) shout
   - (E) tug

44. bias
   - (F) axis
   - (G) mistake
   - (H) double-cross
   - (I) news report
   - (J) slant

45. jocular
   - (A) merry
   - (B) odd
   - (C) sneaky
   - (D) generous
   - (E) bumpy

STOP

Check your work.

Comprehension

If you look carefully at the front legs of an ant, you will see one place with long stiff hairs. These hairs are used like a brush. An ant lifts its leg up and pulls an antenna through the "brush." An ant also licks clean every part of its body it can reach with its tongue. Any part the tongue can't reach, the ant cleans with its feet.

1. An ant cleans itself with its

   (A) teeth (C) tongue
   (B) antennae (D) claws

2. An ant has a "brush" on its

   (E) mouth (G) front legs
   (F) stomach (H) head

During his lifetime, the inventor Frederick McKinley Jones, a black American, was awarded more than 60 patents. More than 40 were for refrigeration devices. One of these was a unit to cool the inside of a truck. This first practical truck refrigeration unit helped to completely change the food industry. For the first time it was possible to transport meat, fruit, vegetables, eggs, butter, and other produce that needed refrigeration over long distances during any season of the year. New markets were created for many food crops. The eating habits of many people were changed. Frozen food became available to more individuals.

3. "New markets" refers mostly to people who live

   (A) overseas (C) far from highways
   (B) on islands (D) far from farms

4. Which word best describes the kind of food most affected by Jones' invention?

   (E) canned (G) surplus
   (F) perishable (H) imported

5. Jones' invention mainly affected the way food was

   (A) prepared (C) transported
   (B) grown (D) eaten

A zebra has a very fine sense of smell and a keen sense of hearing, so it can usually scent danger or hear trouble coming more quickly than an ostrich, which lacks these abilities. The ostrich, on the other hand, is blessed with unusually fine eyesight. It can see danger approaching when a zebra cannot. By staying together, these two pool their defenses. In this way, they have triple protection against common enemies.

6. An ostrich is known for its good

   (E) eyesight (G) sense of smell
   (F) intelligence (H) hearing

7. When the two animals are together, they are

   (A) braver (C) enemies
   (B) safer (D) dangerous

The world's highest tides, in the Bay of Fundy between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, create a reversing waterfall. On the outgoing tide, the Saint John River in New Brunswick rushes down over fall-like rapids at its mouth. With the incoming tide, the river water backs up so that it flows upstream over the same rapids, which then churn and cascade in the opposite direction. In the Petitcodiac River, the same tides cause a remarkable wall of water, called a *bore*, from three to six feet high to rush up the nearly empty river at the incoming tide.

8. What is a bore?

   (E) a wall of water (G) the mouth of a river
   (F) a waterfall (H) an empty river

9. What is the passage designed to do?

   (A) describe natural events
   (B) express a love of nature
   (C) warn the reader
   (D) make us believe an old tale

10. The change of direction described in the passage is caused by

    (E) the Saint John (G) cascades
    (F) the Petitcodiac (H) tides

Knowing cooks remember to stand back when they cut and grate horseradish root. This plant has the most powerful odor of any garden vegetable. Its smell can bring tears to the eyes. Fiery horseradish is used to spice food.

11. This passage is mainly about

Ⓐ cooks
Ⓑ gardens
Ⓒ onions
Ⓓ horseradish

12. In the passage, "knowing cooks" means

Ⓔ cooks who know
Ⓕ cooks who are known
Ⓖ knowing about cooks
Ⓗ knowing some cooks

The snail carries his home on his back. The lizard has his favorite crack in the wall. And masterless dogs have their dark corners where, when night comes, they can creep and from the smell know that this place is their own. Those who have addresses, with the names of streets and numbers that they can use to tell other people where they live, call the rest of us "homeless"; but they are wrong, for every one of us has a home of his own.

13. The author thinks that many people would say that he is

Ⓐ homeless
Ⓑ masterless
Ⓒ at home
Ⓓ a master

14. The author believes that

Ⓔ dark corners are poor homes
Ⓕ everyone has a home
Ⓖ home is where one goes at night
Ⓗ homes are not important

15. The author says that addresses are useful for

Ⓐ knowing where you live
Ⓑ telling others where you live
Ⓒ finding your way home
Ⓓ coming home to

They had a friendly look, these little houses, not as if they were climbing up the shore, but as if they were rather all coming down to meet a fond and weary traveler, and I could hardly wait with patience to step off the boat.

16. What did the houses seem to do?

Ⓔ tumble down
Ⓕ climb up
Ⓖ crowd together
Ⓗ welcome travelers

17. The person in the passage must have been

Ⓐ rested
Ⓑ worried
Ⓒ walking
Ⓓ arriving

Harriet Martineau was one of many foreign visitors who came to the United States during the first decades of the nineteenth century, eager to explore the new democracy at first hand. After 150 years, Martineau's *Society in America* remains a primary source for students of early American society. She described and tried to explain the points of difference and similarity between the young American nation and the more caste-ridden European countries.

18. The main reason Harriet Martineau came to America was to

Ⓔ explore the interior
Ⓕ settle in a new land
Ⓖ see how the democracy worked
Ⓗ interview American students

19. What did Martineau try to provide in her book?

Ⓐ proposals for a system of social justice
Ⓑ the first-hand views of young Americans
Ⓒ a comparison of two societies
Ⓓ an explanation of the American Revolution

20. The passage implies that, for today's history students, Martineau's book may be

Ⓔ a lively account
Ⓕ a useful source
Ⓖ out-of-date
Ⓗ biased

Farmers near the woods find it literally impossible to keep salt blocks in the pastures for their cattle for any reasonable or practical length of time. All sorts of game come in to lick them away. The craving is so great that it overrides natural antipathies. Animals who normally avoid each other forget their differences in the common craze for salt.

21. This passage says that wild animals may forget their

Ⓐ pain
Ⓑ dislikes
Ⓒ young
Ⓓ cravings

22. In the last line, "common" means

Ⓔ shared
Ⓕ well-known
Ⓖ ordinary
Ⓗ frequent

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding line and had no way of knowing how near the harbor was. "Light! Give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul.

23. The author says she felt like a ship that was

Ⓐ moving at night
Ⓑ in a thick fog
Ⓒ far out at sea
Ⓓ leaving the safety of the harbor

24. The feeling described in the passage is one of

Ⓔ hopeless despair
Ⓕ dark foreboding
Ⓖ anxious searching
Ⓗ peacefulness

25. What made a big difference in the author's life?

Ⓐ being able to see
Ⓑ being taught
Ⓒ going on a boat trip
Ⓓ discovering religion

While the subway system has its own police force, including plainclothes detectives, the most dangerous job is done by the men who repair the third rail. There can be no errors with this work, for the high-voltage current is on at all times. If trouble occurs during rush hours, the repairmen may have no more than a minute and a half to work on the live rail before another train comes along. Their only protection is a thin rubber mat which they must stand on every moment. All other workers keep their distance, for a careless touch of a hand by someone not on the rubber mat could be fatal. The part of the job which this special crew dislikes is rescuing stray dogs and cats that wander into the tunnels and often crouch near the third rail. These animals must be pulled to safety with one quick motion without so much as a tail flicking the supercharged steel.

26. This passage is about the job done by subway

Ⓔ uniformed police
Ⓕ detectives
Ⓖ motormen
Ⓗ repairmen

27. The passage says that these people work

Ⓐ in pairs
Ⓑ all night long
Ⓒ only during rush hours
Ⓓ apart from other people

28. The passage says that they especially dislike

Ⓔ rescuing animals
Ⓕ walking in the tunnel
Ⓖ subway fires
Ⓗ crowded trains

29. How do they sometimes have to work?

Ⓐ in secret
Ⓑ without light
Ⓒ quietly
Ⓓ very quickly

30. To protect themselves, they

Ⓔ use rubber mats
Ⓕ stop the trains
Ⓖ radio ahead
Ⓗ crouch near the rail

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Comprehension

As my turn approached, Mr. Boghetti whispered that no matter what happened I must continue to the end of my aria and to be sure to sing the trill. It was lovely of him to refuse to be intimidated by the clicker, but I had been sitting there listening to the other singers, and at least six of them had launched into "O mio Fernando" and had been interrupted before they reached the middle. I made up my mind that I would not defy the rules of the contest. I would stop when the implacable clicker sounded.

I was finally called, and I began with the recitative and then launched into the aria proper, with one part of my mind waiting apprehensively for the voice of doom upstairs. It did not come. I was allowed to sing the whole aria, including the trill. There was a burst of applause from the other contestants in the auditorium because no one had gone through an entire number. An indignant voice reminded everyone that the rule against applause must be observed. Then a judge called from the balcony, "Does 44A have another song?"

31. This passage is mainly about a

(A) contest (C) theater
(B) chorus (D) concert

32. The person telling the story was

(E) the sixth singer (G) Boghetti
(F) 44A (H) Fernando

33. There was a rule against

(A) finishing (C) whispering
(B) interrupting (D) clapping

34. The person telling the story was determined to

(E) wait patiently
(F) obey the rules
(G) continue to the end
(H) listen to the others

35. What "did not come"?

(A) applause (C) the aria
(B) the trill (D) the clicker sound

We went down to the shore and I delivered a short technical lecture, but the boys paid no attention. Without hesitation they accompanied me to a shallow rocky bottom amidst sea wrack, spiny urchins, and bright fish. The peaceful water resounded with screams of delight as they pointed out all the wonders to me. They would not stop talking. Philippe's mouthpiece came loose; I crammed it back in place and jumped to Jean-Michel to restore his breathing tube. They tugged at me and yelled questions as I shuttled between them, shoving the grips back between their teeth. In a short time, they absorbed a certain quantity of water, and it was apparent that nothing short of drowning would still their tongues. I seized the waterlogged children and hauled them out of the water.

36. How did the boys feel about going in the water?

(E) reluctant (G) silly
(F) eager (H) frightened

37. Why did the boys pay no attention to the lecture?

(A) they got there too late
(B) they were under water
(C) they were screaming
(D) they weren't interested in it

38. What was the water like?

(E) muddy (G) shallow
(F) cold (H) rough

39. The boys had trouble with the equipment because they were

(A) diving (C) talking
(B) jumping (D) tugging

Comprehension

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

40. What does the speaker hope will unite people?

- Ⓔ the broad land
- Ⓕ the common enemy
- Ⓖ memory
- Ⓗ passion

41. The speaker insists that his listeners must

- Ⓐ protest
- Ⓑ wake up
- Ⓒ break their bonds
- Ⓓ be friends

42. The speaker wishes to

- Ⓔ assail his enemies
- Ⓕ break his oath
- Ⓖ preserve the government
- Ⓗ protect the aggressors

43. The speaker says a civil war would have to be started by

- Ⓐ a solemn oath
- Ⓑ the government
- Ⓒ his fellow citizens
- Ⓓ the will of heaven

STOP

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